

Jewish Miracle Workers and Magic

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Nina Haynie

In Second Temple Period

- Jews believed that miracles occurred
 - Saw miracles as “signs” or “wonders”
 - They believed God worked through men and women to perform miracles
 - Stories of miracle workers were told by their admirers, but raised many questions
- Jews asked four questions to analyze and understand the miracles that were witnessed.
 - Do these miracle workers have their own natural capabilities or is an external source fueling them, like magic or God’s gift?
 - Who receives credit for the miracle, God, the miracle worker, or the techniques being used?
 - Who profits from the miracle?
 - How could miracles be used for good and evil?

Miracle Workers Abilities?

- Moses was a model for a charismatic prophet, a “Man of God”, which allowed him to perform miracles.
 - Performed miracles at God’s command, his abilities came from God.
- Elijah and Elisha performed miracles were said to have superhuman power, however some of their powers were fueled by God.
- In the early second century CE, rabbinic miracle workers struggled with magicians and witches
 - They would teach the rabbis’ spells

Miracle Workers Abilities Cont...

- When Jesus performed miracles for the people, some Jews and Romans questioned where he received his power
 - Jews that supported him believe the Holy Spirit
 - Jews that hated him believed demonic powers
 - Rabbis' believed that Jesus performed miracles through knowledge of magic

Who Receives Credit?

- Moses received respect for performing miracles, but because it was coming from God, God gained respect as well.
- Both Elijah and Elisha were given credit for their beneficial miracles, such as healing, resurrection people, feeding the hungry, brining rain, etc.
 - Enhanced their miracle status
- Josephus highlights that when King Solomon used David's psalms to perform exorcisms, he received credit.
- Jesus also received credit for his miracles.
 - Gospels connected him to Moses, David, Solomon, and Elijah.

Who Profits from Miracles?

- For Moses, the Israelites benefited from his miracles, being that he saved them from bondage.
- Elijah and Elisha's beneficial miracles benefitted the individuals they helped and themselves.
- Jesus' miracles benefitted all the people he was able to heal and deliver.

Miracles: Good vs. Evil

- Moses performed miracles aggressively and vindictively
 - Egyptians victim of his miracles
 - Affiliated plagues
- Elijah and Elisha's miracles were harsh
 - destroyed armies sent out for him and cause a 2 year drought that cause hunger.
 - destroyed the army surrounding Samaria and had two bear attack 40 children
- Tanakh described the necromancer of Endor as a great miracle worker for raising Solomon from the dead.
- Ben Sira recalls miracles of Elijah and Elisha
 - Josephus say Elisha is a doer of “paradoxical deeds” which also described Jesus in *Testimonium Flavianum*

Miracles: Good vs. Evil cont...

- Honi, “the Circle Maker” stoned to death by people of Hyrcanus II because he didn’t want to use his miraculous abilities to curse the leader of an enemy army.
 - Jesus was betrayed by Jews as well, the romans crucified him
- Romans feared miracle workers
 - He thought charismatic figures were dangerous, could curse you
 - Crucified Jesus and persecuted his disciples, mostly Paul and Peter

Miracles these days...

- Miracles aren't as common, easy to perform as they were in the Second Temple Period.
- In the Middle Ages, Jews began to doubt miracles.

Sources

- Bohak, Gideon. “Jewish Miracle Workers and Magic in the Second Temple Period” In *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, edited by Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME Perkins, 5th Edition, 1837-40. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.